

Remarks to United States Troops in Port-au-Prince, Haiti

March 31, 1995

The President. Thank you.

Audience member. Go, Razorbacks!

The President. Who said, "Go, Razorbacks?" We should have had a longer promotion ceremony up here. *[Laughter]*

General Fisher asked me to take roll call. Are the 2d Brigade Warriors here? *[Applause]* The 65th Engineer Staffers? *[Applause]* The 1st of the 21st Gimlet? *[Applause]* The DISCOM Lightning Supporters? *[Applause]* The 1st of the 25th Aviation Bandits? *[Applause]* Special Forces Green Berets? Per person, they deserve applause. What about the 3d Squadron 2d ACR Wolfpack? *[Applause]* Are all the Light Fighters present and accounted for? *[Applause]*

I've been told that your lungs are as strong as your hearts and your hands.

Did I leave out anybody? Would you like to be heard? *[Applause]*

Audience members. Semper Fi!

The President. Good for you. *[Laughter]*

Every one of you who has taken part in Operation Uphold Democracy. On behalf of the American people, I am here to say, thank you. Thank you for serving your Nation. Thank you for being democracy's warriors. Thank you for helping to bring back the promise of liberty to this long troubled land. You should be very proud of what you have done.

We gave you a tough and demanding mission which some said could not be done, and you proved them wrong. Look what you have accomplished. Seven months ago, a brutal military regime ruled Haiti, beating and torturing and murdering its citizens. Now the Haitian people are moving from a dark night of fear to a new day of freedom. You and all those who have served since last September helped to make that happen.

Seven months ago, thousands of migrants were streaming out of Haiti. Now tens of thousands of Haitians have come home, home to start to build a better life for themselves and their fellow country men and women. You helped to make that happen.

Seven months ago, the world wondered whether the United States could summon the

will to protect democracy in this hemisphere. Now the world knows once again that the United States will honor its commitment and stand up for freedom. And you helped to make that happen. For all this, you should be very, very proud.

We gave our word, and the men and women of the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, the Marines, and the Coast Guard, you've kept our word. You have succeeded because you're the best trained, best prepared, best equipped fighting force in the world. Your reputation landed in Haiti before you did. And I am convinced that is one of the reasons that so much was done with so little bloodshed. The moment the military rulers learned that you were on the way, they got out of the way.

Since you've been here, you've been asked to do it all, and you have. You've taken thousands of guns off the street. You've helped to train a new Haitian police force. You've repaired roads and bridges. You've brought food and medicine to the farthest reaches of our country—to this country. And of course, you have literally turned the lights back on in dozens of towns.

You not only answered the call of duty, time and again you have gone beyond it. And that is what heroism is all about. Each of you in your own way has become a hero in Haiti. I'd like to mention a few of you whose stories I have learned about.

Sergeant 1st Class Steven Lamb, whose platoon conducted over 140 patrols, often under hazardous conditions: On one mission the platoon came across a mob using steel pipes to beat a man whose hands were tied behind his back. They dispersed the crowd, freed the man, treated his injuries. By stopping violence, confiscating weapons, and diffusing problems before they got out of control, the platoon helped to give hundreds of Haitians a new sense of confidence and security. Thank you, Sgt. Lamb.

I met Sergeant 1st Class Michelle Howard of the Army: Many men and women under her command were overseas for the first time. Their morale was a little low without any mail from home, so she wrote the families of every single soldier in her platoon and told them to sound off in writing more often. Then the letters, postcards and packages

came in by the dozens. And now Sgt. Howard is called by the troops, "Mother Teresa With a 9-Millimeter." Well, thank you Mother Teresa, and thank you, Sergeant Howard.

I met First Sergeant Jose Garcia Apponte, and he and dozens of volunteers from all the service branches, on their free time and with no pay, started the School of Hope to teach Haitians English. Already the school has graduated more than 300 students. And now they'll return to their communities to share what they have learned. Thank you, Sergeant Garcia Apponte.

I met Private 1st Class John Firreno, a medic from the 32 ACR: He was on patrol about midnight last month when he came upon a young Haitian woman about to give birth. Now that requires courage. *[Laughter]* As his comrades clustered around him with flashlights, he helped to deliver an eight-pound baby boy. Well, he didn't get a medical degree, but the boy now bears his name. Thank you, Private Firreno.

I want to thank the special forces who fanned out across the country and helped our local leaders learn the basics of government of, by, and for the people, good things like keeping the streets safe and holding town meetings and even some of the not so good things like collecting taxes.

Through these and dozens of other acts, big and small, you have defended democracy and made it stronger here. You have shown the Haitians what it means to be a soldier in a free society, working for the people, not against them. And when you go home, you must know that you have inspired a new generation of Haitians, supported by the United Nations mission, to carry on the never-ending struggle for freedom.

I know that for those of you who are preparing to leave, your loved ones are ready to welcome you home. General Sullivan, the Army Chief of Staff, recently visited in Hawaii with the families of the 25th Infantry Division soldiers. On my behalf, he thanked them for their sacrifice and the extraordinary support they have given to you. They and all of our military families have been heroes, too. And our country is in their debt, as well.

I'd also like to thank the soldiers from other countries who have been our partners in this remarkable endeavor. I know some

of them are represented to my right here. Some of them have shared this encampment with you, and some of them are in other places. I got to thinking about what a small world it can be when we are united for democracy and freedom.

Some of you may know that the First Lady, is about to visit two of the countries represented here: Bangladesh and Nepal, Americans there and First Lady and my daughter and others; Bangladeshis and Nepalese here, all standing for freedom all across the world, led by the United States, led by you. You should be very proud.

Even though, my fellow Americans, Haiti is democratic, free, and more secure than ever before, we know there is long hard work ahead. And we know that some of you will have a hand in it as part of the United Nations mission. In the end, of course, we all know the Haitian people themselves must rebuild their country and realize their dreams, just as we must in the United States. But now because of you, they have a chance to do so, just as we do in the United States.

The hand-painted signs seen all over Haiti say it all, "Thank you America." Today, America says thank you to the men and women of our Armed Forces who helped to give Haiti a second chance.

Whether you serve in an active unit, the Reserves, or the National Guard, we ask you to bear many burdens. We ask you to travel far from home. We ask you to stand in the face of danger. We ask you to be away from your families and your friends for a very long time. We ask you to protect your country and to defend democracy and freedom. We ask all these things. And time and again, you have risen to the challenge. Today, because of you, the Haitian people know why we call the United States, "land of the free and the home of the brave."

You have allowed freedom to triumph over fear here. You have helped to remind the world that democracy is still on the march, even though it still has enemies. And you have stood up for a principle upon which our country was founded, that liberty is everyone's birthright.

Thank you, each and every one of you, and God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:28 a.m. at Warrior Base. In his remarks, he referred to Maj. Gen. George A. Fisher, USA, Commanding General, 25th Infantry Division.

Remarks in an Arrival Ceremony in Port-au-Prince
March 31, 1995

The President. President Aristide, Mr. Secretary-General, distinguished guests, and citizens of a free and democratic Haiti, *Bonjour*.

I am deeply honored by President Aristide's invitation to speak with you today. In the many months we have known each other I have learned firsthand of President Aristide's tremendous courage. His strength in the face of great challenge reflects the unbreakable will of the Haitian people. We respect him as the President you elected freely and fairly and for his leadership of all Haitians since his return.

Today, we come together as friends. Today, once again, we give life to the ideals of democracy, justice, and freedom. Today, we celebrate the restoration of democracy to your country. Never—never again must it be stolen away.

For centuries, the Haitian people have known little more than blood and terror. You have been robbed of opportunity and deprived of basic rights. Your children have grown up with too much violence. From Cite Soleil to the smallest village in the farthest corner of your land, you have sacrificed much in your quest for liberty. Now you stand on the brink of a new and more hopeful time. Now you have a chance to make real the dreams of those who liberated your nation nearly 200 years ago.

The tasks ahead will not be easy. Democracy does not flow naturally like the rivers, and prosperity does not spring full grown from the Earth. Justice does not bloom overnight. To achieve them, you must work hard, you must have patience, you must move forward together, with tolerance, openness, and cooperation. I believe you can do it, for as President Aristide has said, your challenge is great, but your will to succeed is greater.

Your democracy will be maintained and strengthened by free elections, and respect

for the rights and obligations enshrined in your Constitution. Your government, the United Nations, and the United States will do all we can to guarantee free, fair, and secure elections, first in June and then in December. We know from experience that when elections are free, fair, and secure, you will participate. That is what democracy requires of you, and we know you will do it.

Your nation has been stripped bare of many of its natural resources. But the most important of these resources, you, the people, have survived with dignity and hope. As the proverb says, "*Espwa fè viv*."

Now you have a chance to come together to make the rice fields come alive and harvest the corn and millet, to build the schools and clinics that promise a better future for your children. We, your neighbors, your allies, and your friends, will support your efforts to create jobs, to attract investment from beyond your borders, and to rebuild and repair your injured land.

In a few months, the program will begin to pave the 1,000 kilometers of your roads. And later this year I will send the American Peace Corps here to help to organize the planting of millions of trees. As the roads are built and the trees are planted, thousands of you will have jobs. As you begin this work, I urge your country men and women who fled the terror to return and to help you to rebuild your land and theirs.

Economic progress will demand much patience. But we will stand with you as you tackle the hard and sometimes painful work ahead. *Men anpil chay pa lou*.

There will be times of great frustration as you build your democracy and move toward prosperity. But today, Haiti has more friends than ever before. And so once again, I urge each and every citizen of this nation to come together in this spirit of unity that President Aristide has so eloquently promoted. I can do no better than to repeat his words, "Say no to vengeance, no to revenge, yes to reconciliation."

[*Inaudible*—take the law into their own hands. Each of you must choose, as most of you have already chosen, to build up, not tear down. I congratulate you for the patience you have already shown.